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## **Lone star or team player? The interrelationship of different identification foci and the role of self-presentation concerns**

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Forthcoming in HRM

### **Abstract**

Work identity is important in the attraction and retention of staff, yet how the facets of such identity relate remains convoluted and unclear despite this being of interest to both scholars and practitioners. We use structural equation modelling to analyse Empirical data from 144 employees in the UK's Oil and Gas industry, analysing the nature and interrelationship of identification as individual- (career advancement) and social- (work group and organization) level foci, as well as considering the two psychological self-presentation factors (value-expression and social-adjustment) that direct and drive identification processes. A dichotomy between individual and social components of work identity is found, revealing a strong association between both social-level foci of identification. Moreover, both components of work identity are found to be premised on different psychological factors, furthering our knowledge of the enmeshed nature of identity at work.

**Keywords:** multiple identities, identification processes, self-presentation concerns, social identity theory, social-categorization theory

## **Introduction**

Retaining talented staff is a key challenge for organisations, especially those facing retrenchment (Vaiman & Collings, 2013), or operating in a competitive market. An individual's identification with their organization is crucial to retaining talented employees, and research has considered how HR managers may strengthen such organizational identification in their workforce (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016) by strategically focussing on organizational attractiveness. However, organizations in many sectors, including oil and gas, experience frequent cycles of expansion and downturns, creating a transitory employment experience that may incline future applicants to base their self-definition on their individual career, rather than on wider organizational attributes (Ashforth, Joshi, Anand & O'Leary-Kelly, 2013). An enhanced understanding of the mechanisms of identity and organizational identification is critical in showing whether an individual transactional, elementalistic approach or a more institutionally generic, holistic perspective (Ashforth, Schinoff & Rogers, 2016) would be the most effective attraction strategy for HR Managers to use.

Identity construction comprises individual and social components in determining a person's work identity (Ashforth, et al., 2016; Miscenko & Day, 2015). However, there is some contradictory empirical evidence of multiple identity components (Ramarajan, 2014). Critically, scholars expect the individual and social components of work identity to relate to fundamentally different reasoning, provoking opposing behavioural goals (e.g. Egold & van Dick, 2015). Thus, a strong personal-level identity is likely to lead to identification primarily with factors including individual advancement, status and job success, whereas a social-level identity is orientated towards collective or group advancement (Ellemers, de Gilder & van den Heuvel, 1998). Although individuals are thought to define themselves in terms of multiple levels of self (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010), little is known about the interrelationships between these multiple identities (Ramarajan, 2014). As such, academics and practitioners need to

examine the complex and interrelated nature of identification in order to determine whether and how the plethora of potential simultaneous identities might be connected (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). Such attention would reveal the underlying psychological processes and dynamics of identity-construction (Ashforth et al., 2016). Further, these findings would enhance the sagacity of HR policies, such as whether employees inventing their own job titles improved identification (Grant, Berg & Cable, 2014), and would reveal whether distinctions between identification with career advancement, or with the organization, are illusory or rather fundamental in the attraction and retention of talent.

This study considers the enmeshed nature of identity (Ashforth et al., 2016; Ramarajan, 2014) to examine the distinctiveness and interrelationships of multiple levels of identification within the turbulent Oil and Gas sector, exploring the underlying psychological factors that might direct and drive such identification. Drawing from social identity and self-categorization theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), we distinguish between three personal- and social-level foci that employees identify with to construct the individual and social components of their work identity, namely: identification with individual *career* advancement, with the *workgroup*, and with the *organization*. Given the potentially enmeshed nature of multiple identities, we explore how these different foci of identification interrelate and affect one another. Existing studies have revealed that individual motives and characteristics influence identification with given foci (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). For example, research shows employees' identification with their job (i.e. professional identification) (Apker & Fox, 2002) or workgroup (Riketta, van Dick & Rousseau, 2006) is stronger than with the organization as a whole. This more detailed analysis contributes to calls to clarify the distinct and nested foci of identities (Millward & Haslam 2013). Further, more recent conceptual attention has focused on the consequences of individual differences for identification (Ashforth et al., 2016), and enhancing understanding of mechanisms of self-

expression and social approval in identity construction (Highhouse, Thornbury & Little, 2007). However, the role of self-presentation needs has yet to be thoroughly investigated in an organizational context. This would improve insights into how such individual difference relates to different identity foci (Millward & Haslam 2013). Following Lievens & Highhouse (2003) and Highhouse et al., (2007), we distinguish and examine two forms of self-presentation needs as factors influencing individual work identity and the foci of identification. First, *social-adjustment needs*, emanating from an individual's primary concern of impressing others through conspicuous attainments like pay, rewards, or career advancement. Second, *value-expression needs*, comprising symbolic attributes emanating from socially approved values such as sustainability or social responsibility.

We derive our findings using structural equation modelling of empirical data from 144 employees in UK-based organizations in the Oil and Gas industry. By investigating both the interrelationships between multiple work identities, and the underlying psychological mechanisms in the form of these two self-presentation needs, our study addresses two important gaps in current HRM theory and offers a strong contribution for HRM practice: *First*, we empirically demonstrate the dichotomy between the personal- and social-level components of work identity. Specifically, we show how individual career identification is distinct and independent from identification with the two collective categories of workgroup and organization. Moreover, our data reveals that the two social level foci of identification are strongly interrelated, with workgroup identification driving identification with the wider organization. Thus, our study offers evidence of the enmeshed nature of multiple identifications. Concerning practice, we suggest HR managers become more mindful of these two 'faces' of identity when determining, performance or retention policies, and argue the current predilection of focusing primarily on organizational identification may be misplaced. *Second*, we highlight how personal career identification is solely determined by a need for

social-adjustment, whereas identification with the social workgroup is primarily driven by value-expression needs. By exploring the different psychological factors that direct and drive identification, we provide a more comprehensive representation of the underlying psychological processes of work identity-construction. By contrasting distinct elementalistic dimensions (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016) common to current HR practices, we offer evidence of how and why HR professionals should pay more nuanced attention to the underlying psychological mechanisms of individual identification in an organizational context. In order to attract specific talent, HR managers need to know what this talent finds attractive.

This paper begins by reviewing the literature on work identity and identification before examining the role of self-presentation needs from the applicant attraction literature. We then outline our sample and findings. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications for HRM and offer an agenda for future research.

## **Theoretical background**

### ***Career, workgroup, and organizational identification***

Given the time individuals spend engaged in work oriented activities, it is not surprising that organizations are seen as crucial in shaping an individual's identity (Miscenko & Day, 2015). Conversely, individual identity can also influence the organization, as employees strive to achieve alignment between their work identity and work environment (Kira & Balkin, 2014). More widely, a strong work identity has been associated with a number of positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, organizational citizenship behaviour, individual effectiveness and team performance (Janssen & Huang, 2008; Solansky, 2011; van Dick, Grojean, Christ, & Wieseke, 2006), as well as negative effects including defending organizational wrongdoing (Ploeger & Bisel, 2013). However, rather than being unidimensional, work identity has been characterised as comprising multiple interconnected

sub-identities (e.g. Foreman & Whetten, 2002). The premise here is that work-oriented sub-identities interrelate to determine individual and organizational outcomes, and are themselves influenced by broader, non-work related identities (Miscenko, & Day, 2015). Research however, has only partially explored such multiple identities, resulting in a “sparse and scattered” literature (Ramarajan, 2014: 589), with key omissions concerning whether and how multiple identities interrelate (Millward & Haslam 2013).

Identity has been defined in many ways (see Edwards, 2005), with the majority of definitions focusing on the degree of group level self-perception. Given its multi-dimensional nature, however, we define the concept of individual work identity as “the collection of meanings attached to the self by the individual and others in a work domain” (Miscenko & Day, 2015, p. 2). According to Ashforth (2001), these meanings are based on and manifest themselves in identification with personal or social attributes. Confusion can arise, however, because the previous literature has treated the concepts of identity and identification as synonymous, omitting any clear distinction between the two (e.g. Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For the purpose of this study, we follow Miscenko and Day (2015) and argue that while identity refers to the self-defining meaning an individual ascribes to a particular entity, identification refers to the individual’s cognitive, psychological and emotional attachment to said entity. Thus, identity describes a more internally-oriented state (e.g. organisation-based identity), whereas identification refers to the more externally-oriented process of identity construction (Kreiner, Ashforth & Sluss, 2006). Identity thus emerges from the process of social identification, through which an individual confirms or refutes their subjective beliefs about themselves (equivalent to self-image as defined by Turner et al., 1987), and/or components of that identity (e.g. ‘I am successful’).

We base our rationalization on the social identity approach which consists of two distinct, but closely related theories: social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and self-categorization theory (SCT) (Turner et al., 1987). Here, membership of social groups can positively or negatively contribute to an individual's self-image (Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994) as people ask "How do *I* come to know who I am in relation to *you*" (Pratt, 1998, p. 171; emphasis in the original). Answering this question requires a judgment which references the social groups to whom the individual belongs (Tajfel, 1978b), and an implicit comparison with groups to whom they do not belong (Corley, 2004). The social environment is thus conceptualised as a series of in-groups (us) and out-groups (them) (cf. Hogg & Terry, 2000) used to define and categorise an individual's "place in society" (Tajfel, 1978b, p. 63). More broadly, SIT suggests that an individual's self-concept is based on both *individual* (e.g. perceptions of one's own abilities) and *social* (e.g. workgroup and organizational affiliations) components (Highhouse et al., 2007). SCT argues that social groups emerge whenever individuals perceive themselves as members of a single social category (Turner, 1982), suggesting that individuals can categorize themselves on a personal, or group level.

Accordingly, it is not necessarily management's pragmatic situating of people within the organizational structure and/or culture which has an impact on identification, rather it is the extent to which the individual *perceives* themselves to be an inclusive part of that structure or culture. Under the labels of 'proselfs' versus 'prosocials', two distinct levels of inclusiveness are evident from which a person's identity is typically conceived (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001). While on a personal level, people focus on the traits and characteristics that differentiate themselves from others, on a social level their identity is derived from self-perceived social category membership (Miscenko & Day, 2015). The implication for work identity is that different foci of identification are distinguishable because people can identify themselves on the individual level with (1) their own personal *career*, or



on the social level with (2) different *subunits* within the organization (e.g. workgroups), or (3) with the *organization* as a whole (van Dick, 2004). Combining SIT and SCT exposes the rationale for a dual process of identity construction by referencing the individual and social components of a person's work identity. However, *how* the different foci of identification interrelate remains unclear and the object of this study.

### ***Self-presentation concerns***

Such complexity raises questions about how the different foci of identification interrelate, necessitating consideration of how each emerge. Research has suggested that individual identification processes (Pratt, 2001) are influenced by a repertoire of factors including corporate practices (Turban & Greening, 1997), organizational attributes (Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007), the characteristics of the job (Cable & Turban, 2001), and perceived person-organization fit (Chatman, 1989). From this repertoire, people are able to select identities consistent with their self-concept (Kernis & Goldman, 2003), thereby allowing a coherent self-representation of the ways in which they wish to see themselves and wish to be seen by others (Stets & Burke, 2003). Individuals strive for affiliation with an entity whose values and construed external images match their own (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). Indeed, having a positive external image and others viewing oneself favourably is regarded vital for maintaining self-esteem (Brown & Gallagher, 1991). Necessarily, an important denominator of the identification processes is the influence of the audience (Highhouse, et al., 2007). Individuals choose their foci of identification as a means of expressing themselves and acquiring social approval, thus, whether real or imagined, audiences significantly affect an individual's attitudes, choices and social conduct (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Accordingly, several studies show the focus of identification to be dependent on the perceived symbolic meanings of the identification target (Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong & Joustra, 2007; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The subsequent impact on organizational

attractiveness was highlighted by Lievens and Highhouse (2003) who found that individual job seekers consider both the tangible functional features of a job (e.g. working conditions, payment), and the symbolic meanings their audiences associate (e.g. sincerity, prestige) with said job.

In sum, processes of identification are characterised as drawing on two influences: the *need to be affiliated* with a certain social group, and the *need to be seen to be affiliated* with said social group. The desire to be affiliated stems from the need to test and have affirmed, the congruity between a person and their self-concept. The desire to be seen to be affiliated with an entity is driven by the need for external confirmation of the self-concept, thus for externally prestigious entities an individual can bask in reflected glory (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980).

Potentially different motives for identification are extrapolated from the work of Cialdini and Richardson's (1980), specifically the need for *social-adjustment* and the need for value-expression (Highhouse et al., 2007). Here, people concerned with impressing others will exhibit high social-adjustment concerns, seeking to be imputed with the prestigious values of those with whom they are associated. In contrast, those concerned with authenticity and meaningfulness will exhibit high value-expression concerns, seeking fit with the altruistically intentioned.

As both self-presentation needs are argued to shape individual identification processes, they necessarily affect how people position and negotiate their identity (Schlenker, 1975, 1985; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). The process of identification is therefore premised on how self-presentation needs provoke a person's sense of their self, and on the extent to which others reinforce this sense of self (Pratt, 1998). However, while substantial attention has focused on distinguishing the salient psychological mechanisms that underlie identification (Elsbach,

Sutton, & Principe, 1998), limited consideration has been given to *how* self-presentation needs might relate to the multiple and distinct identification foci.

## **Hypotheses**

### ***Interrelation between different foci of identification***

Theory suggest that a person's self-concept is based on individual and social components. People identify on a personal level with their individual career, and on a social level with their workgroup and/or the organization as a whole (Highhouse et al., 2007). Studies have focused on organizational identification (Miscenko & Day, 2015), with relatively sparse attention on career or workgroup identification.

Organizational identification is a process through which people “define themselves at least partly in terms of what the organization is thought to represent” (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004, p. 2). Necessarily then, attributes of the organization, including heterogeneity of culture, structure, access to others and social groups and the degree of autonomy accorded to employees, alongside their personality and individual agency, all help to define boundaries within which a person's work identity is developed (Ashforth et al., 2016). These boundaries define and are defined by the extent to which people identify with the wider organization, and/or with the workgroup. Here, individual salience determines the relative importance of each level of identification (Christ et al., 2003; Van Dick, 2004).

As workgroups rely on interpersonal interaction, identification with this focus is located at the social level of work identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Workgroups comprise local and ‘less elusive’ collective units, and thus are perceived as cognitively closer than the more distant organization as a whole (Zhang, Chen, Chen, Liu & Johnson 2014). Indeed, research suggests that people identify more readily with the local, salient focus of their workgroup than with the organization. There are two reasons; first, regular social interaction with a workgroup makes

it highly accessible and more relevant to a person's social identity. Second, workgroup identity relates more specifically to an individual's daily working life (e.g. Millward & Haslam, 2013;), thus enabling a stronger identification with the workgroup than with the more remote employing organization (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005).

Identification with the workgroup provides a far richer form of identification than that afforded by organizational identification (Ashforth, 2001). It is seen as more predictive of organizational attitudes and behaviour and is more strongly associated with motivation, involvement and intention to remain (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). Accordingly, van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher & Christ (2004) contend that the foci of workgroup and organizational identification are different and should be separated from one another. Similarly, Zhang and colleagues (2014) argued that identification with these two foci should draw from different motivational underpinnings and separate nomological networks. However, as both foci of identification contribute to the construction of social identity, we posit that they are likely to interrelate. Indeed, Ellemers et al., (1998) have noted that "the very nature of these concepts requires that they be interrelated, because they refer to overlapping entities, with one's team constituting part of the organization as a whole" (p. 728). As an individual's workgroup is embedded in the larger social category of the organization, SIT and SCT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner et al., 1987) suggest that strong identification with the more salient foci of one's workgroup should translate into, and be reflected by identification with the larger and more distant organization. Hence, we hypothesise:

*H1a: Workgroup identification has a positive effect on organizational identification.*

While there are many examples of people choosing to define themselves in terms of their individual career (e.g. Ellemers et al., 1998; Van Dick, 2004), work here is limited. However, Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer & Lloyd (2006) contend that individual differences may pre-

dispose some values and form the basis of variations in levels of professional identification. As such, both individual and social identity may cause people to identify with different aspects of their work, and essentially translate these into different behavioural goals. A primary focus on the personal level, and identification with the individual's career should lead professional achievements and individual career advancement to be construed as a principal identity-establishing factors. In contrast, a strong social identity developed through identification with social categories such as workgroups or the organization, is likely to translate into an orientation towards more collective achievements (Ellemers et al., 1998). Indeed, different foci of identification may have a range of consequences. For example, identifying primarily with individual career advancement may result in a less-than-ideal group performance, whereas a primarily social focus and identification with a single workgroup or organization may be detrimental to individual performance (Ellemers et al., 1998). Empirical studies note that those who strongly identify with personal career advancement are more likely to seek future progression opportunities, and undertake behaviour aimed at finding a better job than those whose primary identification is at the social-level. Indeed, Ellemers et al., (1998) show that the pursuit of individual, career-oriented work goals drives people to limit their work effort on their present job, whereas those who feel strongly committed to their social workgroup are more willing to undertake behaviour aimed at achieving a high team performance. Perceptions of identity fit are found to determine the relative strength of personal-level, as opposed to social-level identification foci (Millward & Haslam, 2013). In sum, people who identify primarily at the individual level will focus on increasing their own payoffs, while those who identify more strongly with social groups, will value the fairness of payoffs and are more inclined to cooperate with others. (De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001). Thus, career identification is a more distinct and individually-focused form of identity, which does not necessarily

translate into identification with the collective of either the workgroup, or the employing organization. Accordingly, we hypothesise:

*H1b: Individual career identification has no effect on social identification with the workgroup or organization.*

### ***Self-presentation concerns and different foci of identification***

Scholars contend that self-presentation concerns wield a significant influence on individual foci of identification. While an individual might appreciate the values and status of a specific entity they identify with, the resulting self-concept is only validated through interaction with an audience (Schlenker, 1985, 1986). A specific focus of identification is not simply an expression of a desired self-concept, but is a consequence of a “transaction among actor, audience, and situation” (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992, p. 142). The audience is central to both the approval of a person’s identity and to any renegotiation, and the process of identification requires movement between these different levels (Schlenker, 1985). The process of identification is premised on an individual’s sense of their self, their need to have this reinforced by others (Pratt, 1998), and on their ability to affiliate themselves with an entity whose values and construed external images match their own (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Following our concept of self-presentation concerns, the choice of a specific foci of identification draws on perceptions of said foci’s prestige (Dutton et al., 1994) and on its attributes and value orientation (Ashforth, Harrison & Curley, 2008).

Our study uses symbolic and functional attributes (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) to examine two dimensions of self-presentation concerns: value-expression and social-adjustment (Highhouse et al., 2007). Acknowledging that both dimensions may be active simultaneously, we posit that they influence a person’s identification foci quite differently. While value-expression concerns are symbolic dimensions concerned with recognizing the self through association with “good” values, social-adjustment concerns by contrast are functional attributes

with a utilitarian frame of reference, designed to impress others and enhance self-esteem (Brown & Gallagher, 1991). While value-expression concerns are likely to encompass features of morality, social-adjustment concerns focus on how others might view tangible choices (Highhouse et al., 2007). As such, the work identity of people high in value-expression concerns is likely to be based on different elements from those with higher social-adjustment concerns. This does not mean that people with contrasting self-presentation concerns will always identify with different foci, rather it is their underlying psychological motives that differ. Thus, two employees, might both identify with their employing organization but the one high on value-expression will do so based on perceived symbolic values (i.e. working for a ‘good’ organization), while other will derive the identification instrumentally from the organization’s reputation (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Research suggests that employees who perceive an overlap between their personal beliefs and their organisational identity, identify more strongly with the overall organization (e.g. Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine and Broadnax (1994) contend that those concerned more with value-expression are likely to base their identity on a collective view of their self, focus their identification on social considerations and ultimately produce a strong social component to their identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). As this dimension of self-presentation needs depends on projecting a symbolic image, people high in value-expression will primarily be concerned with external indicators of respectability or honour (Highhouse et al., 2007). While not negating the possibility of projecting personal values through individual career advancement, studies investigating applicants’ job-choices show that belonging to an organization with a good reputation is more important for those high in value-expression concerns than individual financial gains (Montgomery & Ramus, 2003).

Accordingly, we posit that for individuals high in value-expression, identification with their workgroup or organization will be the dominant foci, not individual career identification (Dutton et al., 1994). However, how outsiders perceive their employing organization is important for employees (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Positive evaluations of an organization lead to stronger employee organizational identification (Carmeli & Freund, 2002), while the perceived distinctiveness of the organization has positive correlations with organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Thus, the more employees see their organization as credible to others, the stronger their identification with it. Practically, concerns for value-expression portray the significance an individual ascribes to being associated with a social group that projects their collective and moral self, as opposed to individual-level considerations, like their career advancement and progression. Translated to the organizational context, we therefore expect those high in value-expression concerns to identify more strongly with the social levels (i.e. the organization as a whole or their subunit within the organization), and less strongly with their individual career (Montgomery & Ramus, 2003). Hence, we hypothesise:

*H2: Value-expression concerns are positively but less strongly associated with (a) career identification than with (b) workgroup identification, and (c) organizational identification.*

Self-presentation needs guide processes of identity construction to ensure others view one favourably. Regarding the social-adjustment dimension, here individuals strive for a positive external self-image by associating themselves with prestigious or impressive entities (Egold & van Dick, 2015; Tajfel, 1978a). Studies from psychology and marketing reveal that those high in social-adjustment concerns are more strongly influenced by the image of a product than by



its actual quality, suggesting a positive association between this concern and status consciousness (e.g. Snyder & DeBono, 1985).

Social-adjustment concerns determine job seekers' interest in jobs which are tangibly more prestigious and impressive than others (Highhouse et al., 2007). Necessarily, such concerns are manifest in the desire to impress others by association with a high status, or prestigious group. While acknowledging that those high in social-adjustment might identify with a workgroup and/or organization perceived as impressive, we posit that their lasting status and prestige are first and foremost secured by clear symbols of their own career advancement. Consistently, those high in social-adjustment concerns are shown to favour tangible external elements (money or material goods), over intangible indicators, such as association to certain groups (Christopher, Morgan, Marek, Keller & Drummond, 2005). In the construction of work identity, we therefore expect those with these needs to privilege individual-level (i.e. career) identification, while being less strongly concerned with social-level identification (either the work-group or organization level). In sum, we hypothesise:

*H3: Social-adjustment concerns are positively but more strongly associated with (a) career identification than with (b) workgroup identification, and (c) organizational identification.*

As social-adjustment concerns are achieved by association with groups characterised as having prestige, those desirous of this identity will strive to align to groups meeting this criterion (Smith et al., 1956). Research confirms that those strongly concerned with social-adjustment focus extensively on tangible attributes which others can observe and evaluate (Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975). Consequently, we posit that social-adjustment concerns are primarily found in individuals who are more focussed on external indicators of individual career advancement, including salary or material gains. These individuals focus on externally

perceived prestige (starting salary, increments and benefits) as a means of evidencing their progression (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Similarly, research on impression management by association, or ‘basking’, has revealed that individuals desirous of such recognition will also identify with particularly successful social groups, including teams and organizations (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Translated to our concept of work identity, we therefore expect the perceived level of prestige to positively moderate the social-adjustment–identification relationship for all three foci of identification. Thus, we hypothesise:

*H4: The relationship between social-adjustment concerns and (a) career identification, (b) workgroup identification, and (c) organizational identification is stronger the higher the respective identification focus’ perceived level of prestige.*

Figure 1 depicts our conceptual framework.

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Insert Figure 1 about here.  
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## **Method**

### ***Sampling and data collection***

In order to test our hypotheses, we collected empirical data from employees within the UK’s Oil and Gas sector. This sector is traditionally characterised by high levels of tangible reward but also higher staff turnover relative to other sectors. A cover letter with a link to an online survey was emailed to staff based in the Aberdeen area. Four weeks later, a second mailing reminded participants of our study.

We contacted 503 employees of which a total of 153 participants (30.4%) responded to the link and completed the survey. Nine questionnaires had to be discarded, resulting in 144 fully usable questionnaires. A small subset of missing values was imputed using the expectation

maximization algorithm, as Little's Chi-Squared-Statistic implied them to be missing completely at random (Little, 1988). Of our respondents 91.7% (n=132) are male, and 8.3% (n=12) female. Respondents' ages range between 24 and 65 years with an average of 47 years. Tenure levels in the employing organization ranged from less than one year to over 15 years (<1 year: 4.2%, n=6; 1-3 years: 20.1%, n=29; 4-7 years: 29.9%, n=43; 8-15 years: 20.8%, n=30; >15 years: 25.0%, n=36). Regarding the hierarchical level, 15.3% (n=22) of respondents are senior managers, 39.6% (n=57) are line managers, and 45.1% (n=65) did not have a management function. Their employing organizations varied in size (number of employees) with 0.7% (n=1) reporting less than 50 employees, 2.8% (n=4) with 51-200 employees, 12.5% (n=18) with 251-500 employees, 22.9% (n=33) 501-1,000 employees, and finally 61.1% (n=88) with more than 1,000 employees.

In line with standard survey research procedures our sample was checked for evidence of possible bias, specifically nonresponse and second common method variance.

*Nonresponse assessment.* Following Poppo, Zhou and Ryu (2008), we compared early (the first 25%) and late survey responders (the last 25%) on several key demographic variables: level of qualification, tenure in the organisation, hierarchical level, and organizational size, measured via the number of employees. Deploying multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), no significant differences were identified (Wilks'  $\Lambda = .90$ ;  $F = 1.78$ ;  $p = .14$ ). Following Armstrong & Overton (1977), the MANOVA test results yields sufficient evidence that nonresponse bias is of no particular concern for our study.

*Common-method assessment.* As both independent and dependent variables were derived from a single source, there is a potential of common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Following Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, (2003) and good research practice, we took several measures in order to *a priori* minimize the risk of

common method bias. Specifically, personal and organizational confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study were stressed in the introduction to the questionnaire, and we assured participants that all their responses would be kept anonymous. Respondents were not offered any inducement in return for their participation in the research. Further, exogenous and endogenous variables' items were separated over the length of the survey, with several reverse-coded items included. Two subsequent tests for common method variance were conducted using several statistical procedures. Generally, if common method variance were present, correlations among the items would be high (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). First, where method variance is present, high correlations would result in a single underlying factor that would explain most of the variation in the items (Bae & Lawler, 2000). Thus, the Harman one-factor test was used for this analysis (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Testing our data reveals a solution that accounts for 72.34% of the total variance, with a single factor solution accounting for only 33.30% of the variance. Since no single factor emerged and nor explains the majority of the variance, common method variance appears to be of limited concern. Consistent with existing research (Williams, Hartman & Cavazotte, 2010) as recommended by Lindell and Whitney (2001), we also included a theoretically unrelated marker variable in our model in order to test for common method variance. All significant correlations between our principal constructs remain statistically significant even when common method variance is controlled (all corresponding values are stated in Appendix A). Sensitivity analysis further shows all significant correlations remain statistically significant even beyond  $p \leq .01$  (i.e. at  $z_a = 2.58$ ), suggesting that common method variance is not a serious problem (Lindell & Whitney, 2001).

### ***Empirical measures***

All our measures were derived from relevant literature to enable a multi-foci perspective on identity and self-presentation needs, with previous studies repeatedly showing the merit of

using well-tested scales to provide reliable information (John & Reve, 1982). All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from one (totally disagree) to five (totally agree) (See Appendix B). Following Jarvis, MacKenzie and Podsakoff's (2003) classification criteria, all constructs were measured reflectively.

*Foci of identification.* We measured identification with three foci: career, workgroup, and organizational identification. Organizational identification was measured with four items from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational identification scale, deleting one due to inappropriateness in the context of this sample. A sample item is: 'The successes of my organisation are my successes'. To measure individual's workgroup identification, we built on Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational identification work, devising a new four-item scale. Again, one item from the original scale was omitted as it could not be adapted to this workgroup context. A sample item includes: 'When someone criticizes my workgroup, it feels like a personal insult'. In measuring identification with their individual career, we used a four-item scale, comprising two items from van Dick et al., (2004) and two items from Ellemers et al., (1998). Sample items include: 'I identify myself as a career-oriented person', and 'My career plays a central role in my life'.

*Perceived prestige.* We measured perceptions of prestige for all three given foci of identification. Employing organisations' perceived prestige was measured using five items from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) perceived organizational prestige scale. An example item is, 'Employees are proud to say they work at this company'. For perceived prestige at the workgroup level a new scale based on four items from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) perceived organizational prestige scale was devised by rephrasing this to fit this context. A sample item includes, 'People are proud to say they work in this team'. Similar to the organizational and workgroup level questions, we adapted the wording from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) scale to

fit the individual level. In total, three items measure perceived career prestige. A sample item is, 'I find this profession prestigious'.

*Self-presentation concerns.* Individuals' self-presentation concerns were measured using Highhouse et al.'s (2007) ten-item social identity consciousness scale, which comprises five items assessing social-adjustment needs and five assessing value-expression needs. Sample items are, 'Working for an impressive company would make me seem impressive to others', and 'I would hope that the company has an honourable reputation in the community'.

*Controls.* Organizational research has frequently been criticized for neglecting the role that contextual factors might play (e.g. Bamberger, 2008). To address this issue and to ensure that our results are robust across contexts, we included a range of contextual variables including age, gender, hierarchical level, and organizational size. While age was measured on a ratio scale, a dummy variable captured gender (coded 1 for female and 2 for male). The respondents' hierarchical level was measured via one five-item scale (1 = senior management; 2 = middle management; 3 = first-level management; 4 = professional; 5 = non-management). Similarly, the organizations' size was assessed on a three-point scale, ranging from 1 = below 250 employees, 2 = between 251 and 1,000 employees, to 3 = more than 1,000 employees.

### ***Measure validation***

Before analysing our data, we assessed the construct validity and reliability of our measures, relying on exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) guidelines. First, the exploratory factor analysis resulted in factor solutions which were theoretically expected. Second, we conducted an item-level confirmatory factor analysis for all eight latent constructs using SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015) to assess the convergent validity and reliability of our measures. Due to unsatisfactory loadings, a number of items were dropped (see Appendix B). All remaining factor loadings are highly significant

( $p \leq .001$ ) and above the .40 benchmark, validating the unidimensionality of the refined measures (Bagozzi & Baumgartner, 1994). For all multi-item scales except organizational identification ( $\alpha = .69$ ), Cronbach's alpha was equal to or exceeded the common .70 standard of reliability (Nunnally, 1967). The internal consistency of this organizational identification scale was only marginally below the common threshold (i.e. by less than .01) and still far exceeded the acceptable standard of .60 (Aron & Aron, 1999; Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010), we retained this factor from our model. Composite reliabilities all exceeded .60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), and the average variance-extracted (AVE) indices are all greater than .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover, multicollinearity does not seem to pose a problem as the highest VIF value is 1.61, which is well below the rule-of-thumb level of 10 (Cryer & Miller, 1994). Additionally, we tested for discriminant validity by verifying whether each construct's variance shared with other constructs is lower than its AVE. As this is the case for all of our constructs, discriminant validity is indicated (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Lastly, we assessed the overall fit of our model using AMOS 23 (Arbuckle, 2015). Our hypothesized eight-factor model provided a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2(df) = 323.26(232)$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.39$ ; CFI = .94; IFI = .94; SRMR = .069; RMSEA = .052). We then used the nested model testing procedure to examine the adequacy of our measures by comparing the eight-factor solution to several alternatives. These included a model combining the three foci of identification into one factor (six-factor model), a subsequent model combining the two self-presentation concerns into one factor (five-factor model), a further model combining the three perceived prestige scales into one factor (three-factor model) and a single-factor model. All of these models resulted in a significant decrease in fit as judged by the chi-square difference test. Hence, we proceeded with the eight-factor solution.

## Results

We used structural equation modelling (SEM) with partial least squares (PLS) estimation to test our hypotheses (Ringle et al., 2015). SEM provides very accurate results due to its simultaneous estimation of structural relations and measurement errors. The PLS estimation method was deployed as it has several advantages over the alternative covariance-analytical approach, such as less strict assumptions regarding the distribution of data and a robust estimation of smaller samples, like ours (Goetz, Liehr-Gobbers, & Krafft, 2010). We relied on bootstrapping to assess the significance of estimated results (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The means, standard deviations and correlation between the variables for our sample are reported in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here.  
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Table 2 shows the results of the PLS-SEM analysis. We follow common reporting standards and separately assess the effect of controls (Model 1), predictor variables (Model 2) and interaction effects (Model 3) on the three foci of identification. As indicated by the  $R^2$  we report, our model explains between 32 and 54 percent of the variation in the endogenous constructs, suggesting that the model fits the data satisfactorily (Chin, 1998). With regard to the contextual factors that we control, gender had no major influence. The hierarchical level, however, seems to have a significant negative influence on both workgroup ( $\beta = -.21, p \leq .001$ ) and organizational identification ( $\beta = -.22, p \leq .01$ ), (see Table 2, Model 1). This denotes that people with lower hierarchical levels identify less strongly with either their workgroup or organization. Further, our data indicates a negative effect of age on individual career ( $\beta = -.14, p \leq .1$ ) and social workgroup identification ( $\beta = -.10, p \leq .1$ ), albeit on lower levels of significance. Similarly, Model 1 shows that organizational size has a significant negative effect



on career identification ( $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) and Models 2 and 3 (see Table 2) further provide evidence for a negative effect of organizational size on organizational identification ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p \leq .1$ ), which is not significant, however, when only considering controls (Table 2, Model 1).

Regarding the important interrelationships of the different foci of identification, we find strong empirical support for the positive effect of workgroup identification on organizational identification (H1a) ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) (see Table 2, Model 2). In contrast, H1b proposes a non-effect of individual career identification on social identification with the workgroup and organisation. Given that the nested model testing procedure indicated a significant decline in fit when the three foci of identification were combined into a single factor and no significant effects of career identification were shown on either workgroup ( $\beta = .07$ ) or organizational identification ( $\beta = -.10$ ), H1b is supported (see Table 2, Model 2).

Concerning the positive, but less strong, association of value-expression concerns and individuals' career identification, as compared to that for value-expression and workgroup or organizational identification (H2a, b, and c), our results only provide partial empirical support. Specifically, we find value-expression positively associated with just work-group identification ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ; H2b) (see Table 2, Model 2). Neither career identification ( $\beta = .04$ ) nor organizational identification ( $\beta = .01$ ) shows a significant effect of value-expression, refuting both H2a and H2c. In sum, these results indicate that the effect of value-expression concerns on the different foci of identification is more complex than initially expected.

In comparison, our proposed positive and stronger association between social-adjustment concerns and career identification is supported ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ; H3a). This contrasts with considerably lower and less significant effects of social-adjustment concerns on both workgroup ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p \leq .1$ ; H3b) and organizational identification ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p \leq .1$ ; H3c) (see Table 2, Model 2).

In examining whether the relationship between social-adjustment concerns and career, workgroup, and organizational identification is stronger with greater prestige at the respective identification foci (H4a, b, and c), our results indicate a positive significant interaction of social-adjustment with career prestige ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ; H4a), but a negative significant interaction with organizational prestige ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p \leq .1$ ; H4c), and no significant interaction with workgroup prestige ( $\beta = -.07$ ; H4c) (see Table 2, Model 3, and Figures 2a and b for a depiction of these patterns of interaction). Hence, only H4a receives empirical support, whereas H4b and c are refuted.

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Insert Figures 2a and b about here.  
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In sum, our data demonstrates a strongly positive association between the two social foci of workgroup and organizational identification, and also that these are distinct from individual career identification (see Figure 3 for a graphical illustration of our results). Further, we confirm different antecedents of these distinct foci of identification, with social-adjustment concerns increasing career identification (an effect that is further enhanced by career prestige), while workgroup and organizational identification are considerably less effected. Interestingly, the latter is diminished by organizational prestige. By contrast, value-expression concerns reveal a positive impact on work-group identification, but surprisingly have no effect on either career or organizational identification.

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Insert Figure 3 about here.  
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## Discussion

### *Career, workgroup, and organizational identification*

Building upon earlier work (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), we distinguish between individual and social components of identity. Consequently, we show that work identity draws on the different foci of individual career, social work-group, and organizational identification (van Dick, 2004). Given the paucity of research on career identification (Miscenko & Day, 2015), our study is amongst the first to shed light on this individual aspect of work identity. Investigating further the interrelationship between individual career identification and social identification with the workgroup and organisation, we confirm the convoluted nature of work identity and demonstrate how identification with the workgroup translates into simultaneous identification with the organization (c.f. Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). However, our results offer a more comprehensive perspective on these three aspects of identification (Millward & Haslam, 2013). By revealing a marked difference between the individualised focus on career advancement as separate from social identification with the workgroup and organization, we challenge the notion of interconnected work-related sub-identities (e.g. Miscenko & Day, 2015). More specifically, our findings introduce an interesting complexity by highlighting two distinct, and possibly opposing components of identity which jointly influence a person's perceptions and their behaviours in organizations.

Prior research suggests that individual and social components of work identity are premised on fundamentally different mechanisms, with each promoting a focus on opposing behavioural goals (e.g. Egold & van Dick, 2015). Thus, whereas a strong social identity has been shown to translate into an orientation towards group advancement and collective payoffs, a strong individual identity is likely to lead people to identify primarily with their individual career advancement and personal gains (De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001; Ellemers et al., 1998). There

are implications for talent retention (Schaubroeck, Ganster & Jones, 1998). As organizations rely increasingly on teamwork (Schaubroeck & Ganster, 1991), so organizational performance is substantially dependent on the willingness of employees to subordinate themselves to the social group (Podsakoff, Ahearne & MacKenzie, 1997). We suggest that career identification might adversely affect a willingness to commit to the team, with individual goals likely to take precedence. Thus strong identification with individual career advancement can limit a person's contribution to the collective good, and provoke substantial staff attrition (Cascio, 1991; Ellemers et al., 1998).

Controlling for respondents' age revealed a negative effect on career identification and, to a lesser extent, workgroup identification, with identification levels decreasing with age. In this regard, our findings are in line with extensive research showing the changes for value orientation over the working life (e.g. Ardelet, 2000), and between different generations (e.g. Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Regarding the two social-level foci of identification, our study demonstrates a strong and positive effect of workgroup identification on organizational identification. Augmenting the plethora of literature on organizational identification (Miscenko & Day, 2015), our study reveals the interrelationships by showing clearly that individuals' identification with their employing organization draws strongly from their identification with their workgroup. We therefore corroborate and add to earlier studies to suggest workgroup identification as potentially more important than identification with the wider organization (e.g. Millward & Haslam, 2013; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000; Zhang et al., 2014). Our findings are consistent with the argument that people prioritize workgroup identification over organizational identification because of its greater salience (Christ et al., 2003; Millward & Haslam, 2013). The HR literature proffers explanations for this, including workgroup

accessibility for employees due to the more frequent interactions and a higher daily task fit (Millward & Haslam, 2013). As the individuals within sample are employed in the Oil and Gas sector, we offer an additional explanation. As these employees operate in a high risk/high stakes context, and under adverse conditions, the connections between individual members of a workgroup are likely to be strong. Thus, we argue that beyond mere workgroup proximity and accessibility, the perceptual salience of personal safety and mutual well-being might impute the workgroup with far higher relevance for individuals.

Controlling for organizational size provided empirical evidence for weaker identification with the organization as its size increases. This is in line with previous research, which found that smaller organizations tend to provide a more proximal and clear foci of identification (Ashforth, Saks & Lee, 1998; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Moreover, we also find strong empirical evidence for a weaker identification with the individual career for those working in larger organizations. Organizational size has repeatedly been shown to be an important factor in shaping individual cognition (e.g. Shinkle & Kriauciunas, 2010), with the literature offering two potential explanations. First, increases in organizational size have been linked to increased levels of organizational bureaucracy and inertia which may incline people to place less emphasis on individual career advancement (Hannan & Carroll, 1995). Second, larger organizations usually exhibit taller hierarchical structures with embedded leadership positions and systematised opportunities for promotion (Crawshaw, van Dick, & Brodbeck, 2012) which, combined with individual factors, may prescribe a career trajectory (Chiaburu, Muñoz, & Gardner, 2013). Where there are more opportunities for leadership progression, an individuals' career may advance even without the individual actively propelling this. Hence, greater organizational size may weaken individual career identification.

Controlling for the effect of hierarchy reveals that both workgroup and organizational identification decreases for those of lower hierarchical level. While the idea of individual salience as a denominator of identification (e.g. van Dick, 2004) provides a good rationalization for a reduction in organizational identification, initially the workgroup identification result seems surprising. However, as workgroups offer the most exclusive category in an organizational context (Millward & Haslam, 2013) and those at the lower levels of the hierarchy either might not always be affiliated with a workgroup, or might (as in the Oil and Gas context) be part of continually changing teams, this result is more plausible. Overall, our findings highlight the relevance of individual characteristics (i.e. age and hierarchy) in the process of work identity construction, which raises the question of the impact of other personal factors, such as cultural ethnicity (Jiang, Chua, Kotabe & Murray, 2011). More broadly, we acknowledge that contextual variations can and might influence the relative strength of identification with given social foci (cf. Ashforth et al., 2016). Hence, it would be worthwhile to investigate organizational phenomena beyond the scope of our study, including physical workplace conditions (Elsbach & Pratt, 2007), or organizational climate and culture (Bamberger & Biron, 2007).

### ***Self-presentation concerns***

In order to produce comprehensive insights into the psychological processes that underlie work identity-construction, we investigate the effect of self-presentation concerns on identification with individual and social foci. Specifically, we find individual career identification to be strongly associated with social-adjustment but not value-expression concerns, and we reveal a similar albeit much weaker link for the social component of organizational identification. Further, our data reveals identification with the social category of workgroup to be driven much more strongly by value-expression than social-adjustment. Hence, our results generally confirm the existence of two, largely independent, components of work identity based upon

different psychological concerns. We also reveal important mechanisms in the processes of identity-construction.

*First*, although our study shows that social-adjustment concerns primarily drive individual career identification, we also find that social-adjustment has a positive impact on workgroup identification. This suggests that prestige and status are also important to those who identify principally with the social foci of their workgroup (Highhouse et al., 2007), providing a value congruent boundary between the individual and social components of work identity. Indeed, this might be expected in a sector characterised by relatively high salaries. Likewise, workgroup identification may not be driven only by concerns for value-expression, but also by concerns for social-adjustment. This is not surprising considering the premise that people derive social approval from affiliation to certain social groups. Here, membership of a successful work-team is likely to impress others (Dutton et al., 1994), just as affiliation to an honourable workgroup expresses one's "good" values to others (Ashforth et al., 2008). Herein, our findings also confirm that social-level identification may result from different underlying psychological motives.

*Second*, we need to acknowledge that prestige is found only to enhance the effect of social-adjustment on individual career identification, and not on social-level workgroup or organizational identification. Interestingly, instead our data implies that as organizational prestige rises, the effect of social-adjustment on organizational identification declines. Combined, these findings confirm that those with high social-adjustment concerns focus extensively on how others perceive their personal status, albeit not necessarily considering the organization itself. This further substantiates Highhouse et al.'s (2007) contention that social-adjustment concerns cause people to obsess more strongly over tangible external indicators of success (money or material goods), than over the more intangible symbolic associations with

certain social groups (cf., Christopher et al., 2005). However, we suggest psychological motives may lie deeper. Whereas value-expression concerns encompass features of personal values, social-adjustment concerns are entirely other-focused (Highhouse et al., 2007). Thus, we argue those high in social-adjustment concerns promote more strongly their individual work identity as opposed to their affiliation to certain social groups. In responding to calls for more attention to substantiate the distinctiveness of these two distinct components of work identity (Millward & Haslam, 2013), we conclude that such people attempt to actively present themselves as independently successful, rather than as belonging to a successful organization.

*Third*, importantly, our results imply that, rather than a *prima facie* focus on the organisation as a locus of identification, self-presentation concerns prioritise the salience of local level (career and workgroup) identifications. Regarding the effect of value-expression on social-level identification, we add further credence to the notion that individuals prioritize identification with their more salient workgroup above organizational identification. Specifically, people seem better able to assess whether a workgroup's values match their own (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Given the specific context we investigated, we suggest that organizational identification, rather than taking precedent, is only used to legitimate and frame identifications which are better suited to the individual's needs.

### ***Practical contributions to HR management***

There are practical implications of these results for HR managers, although we recognise that our data was derived from a unique context (UK Oil and Gas), characterised by relatively high salaries and high levels of turnover. Certainly, we can only speculate how far peoples' work identities might be linked to these high levels of turnover. However, our results shed light on and create insights into the potential psychological reasoning of those choosing to remain with their employing organization.



*First*, although in most cases both individual and social components of work identity may be simultaneously active, our findings indicate their relative levels vary between people. There are robust implications for HR practice here. A clear sense of how employer branding appeals on both an individual and a social level is important in order to attract and retain talent appropriate to organizational need. The misrepresentation of what employees may expect, be that in terms of instrumental reward, or social and emotional connections, can create an identity dissonance. Here, personal identity dissonance may be compounded by a pejorative perception of construed external images. Indeed, while extant research shows it is costly for organisations not to meet the expectations of their customers, it is suggested that there may be an equal, or greater, cost associated with losing staff who have unmet expectations (Tzafrir, Gur & Blumen, 2015).

*Second*, our results indicate that career identification, and with it individuals' personal advancement concerns, might not always be the best decision criteria in assessing a person's performance. Given the different behavioural goals associated with career versus social-level identification, this holds especially true for organizations which rely heavily on collaborative working. Indeed, it seems crucial for HR managers to free themselves from traditional individualised performance indicators that measure personal achievement, to focus more on group and organization outcomes. Thus we suggest HR managers re-evaluate their organizations' performance management systems to determine precisely how human resource management strategies are being used. (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Makela, Smale & Sumelius, 2013). Specifically, HR managers should consider the extent to which operational practices might actively promote and enhance individual identification, rather than supporting more workgroup collective identity orientations. The use of traditional performance appraisal, for example, is likely to have detrimental social-level identification impacts. By requiring the explicit identification of individual contributions in collective endeavours, rather than

rewarding the whole team, these systems might be antithetical to workgroup identification. Indeed, such systems have been shown to have a deleterious impact on those performing equally important, but less obvious roles. Additionally, there is some evidence of how the choice of performance management practices might influence those who are attracted and retained in an organisation (Berger, Harbring & Sliwka, 2013; Blume, Rubin & Baldwin, 2013). Lastly, evidence is emerging on the importance of certain key roles that support and enable workgroups' stars (e.g. Stuart & Moore, 2014), albeit HR systems that focus only on rewarding the stars can undermine the willingness of their 'supporters' to undertake their equally important duties. In sum, we therefore believe that HR ought to pay greater attention to the fundamental differences in individual and social identity-construction processes and the impact these have in the organisation by reinforcing personal and collective performance.

*Third*, our findings suggest that the standalone value of organizational identification may have been previously over-stated, which causes us to question the utility of HR practitioners focusing on high-level employer branding as a key attraction and employee engagement strategy. Instead, the strong association between workgroup and organizational identification not only demonstrates that the social foci of identification are enmeshed (Ashforth et al., 2008), but also implies scope for actively shaping work identity-construction in a way that harnesses its performance potential (Haslam, Egghins & Reynolds, 2003). At a practical level, this has strong implications for HR managers. Given that previous research has demonstrated the crucial importance of organizational identification for various performance criteria and productivity (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000), HR managers ought to exploit this association between workgroup and organizational identification. Specifically, as workgroup identification subsequently fosters the creation of an organizational identity, identification with this more proximal focus should be facilitated through increased attention to the relevant structural and contextual factors (Millward & Postmes, 2010). By understanding the precise conditions under

which organizational identification emerges, our findings provide evidence as to the merit of HR managers addressing structural and contextual imperatives that drive identity-construction and thereby actively shape these processes.

### **Limitations and future research opportunities**

Although we have given extensive consideration to the validity and reliability of our findings, our study is subject to several limitations. First, due to its cross-sectional nature, it is not possible for us to test causality or rule out the likelihood of reverse causality. Therefore, further experimental or longitudinal studies are needed to examine the implied causality with greater confidence. Another limitation is the use of single-source data. While several steps were taken to both mitigate and test responses in order to ensure any adverse impact was small, we cannot rule out entirely the small probability of bias. We further acknowledge the unsatisfactory level of internal consistency of our scale measuring organizational identification, and would encourage future research to develop a new or refine an existing measure. Lastly, we recognize the small number of females (8.3%) within our sample, which undoubtedly traces back to the unbalanced employment structure of the industry we investigated. However, an important feature of future research would be to use a more gender balanced sample.

In considering future research, we draw attention to three possible extensions of our work: First, as our findings identify two distinct and largely independent components of work identity and imply the relevance of individual characteristics, subsequent studies could seek to compare their relative levels in other industries, such as banking or public services, and across different nations or cultural ethnicities (Bamberger, 2008). Currently we can only speculate to which extent different foci of identification might be more prominent in other contexts. Secondly, we encourage future study broadening our focus from individual characteristics to consider organizational phenomena beyond organizational size. We believe contrasting intra-

organizational situational factors, such as different HR practices, workplace conditions, or organizational cultures might reveal potentially interesting effects (Ashforth et al., 2016). Third, it would be interesting to examine the dynamics of identity-construction within organisations which have recently been linked to high profile environmental disasters. Longitudinal studies might consider the distinct impact for those with high concerns for value-expression compared to concerns for social-adjustment on identification and work identity.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to further our understanding of the interrelationships between multiple work identities, specifically individual and social identification with different foci, and the psychological factors that direct and drive these identification processes. Herewith, we respond to calls for more attention towards the enmeshed nature of identity (Ramarajan, 2014). In sum, we theoretically and empirically demonstrate a dichotomy between individual and social components of work identity. Specifically, we demonstrate how social-level identification foci interrelate, but are distinct from individual-level identification. Moreover, we highlight how both social and individual components of work identity trace back to different dimensions of self-presentation concerns, thus offering a comprehensive picture of the psychological processes of work identity-construction.

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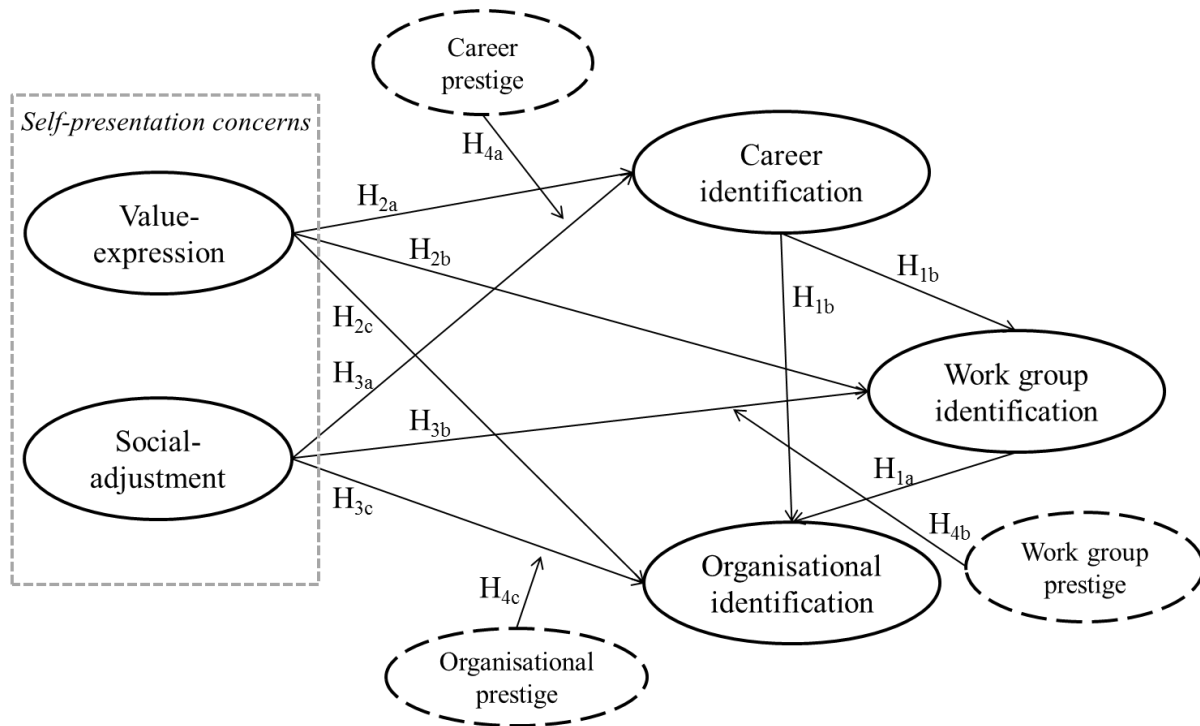
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## Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual model



Controls: organisational size, age, gender, and hierarchical level

Figure 2a. Effect of career prestige  $\times$  social-adjustment on career identification

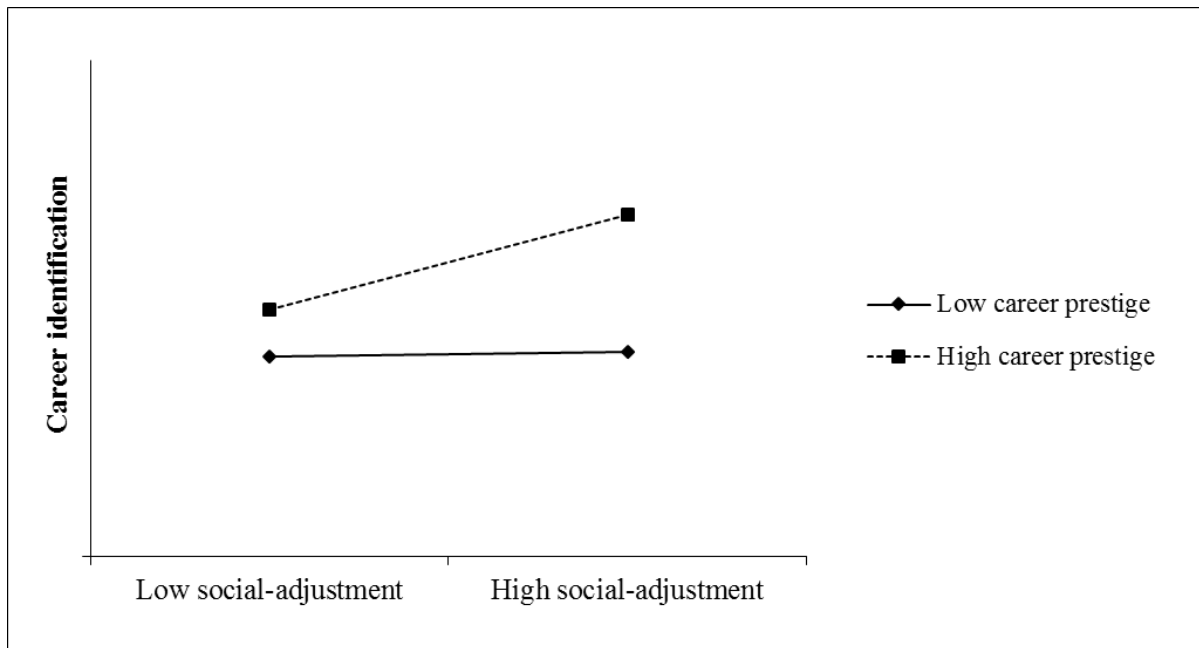


Figure 2b. Effect of organizational prestige  $\times$  social-adjustment on organizational identification

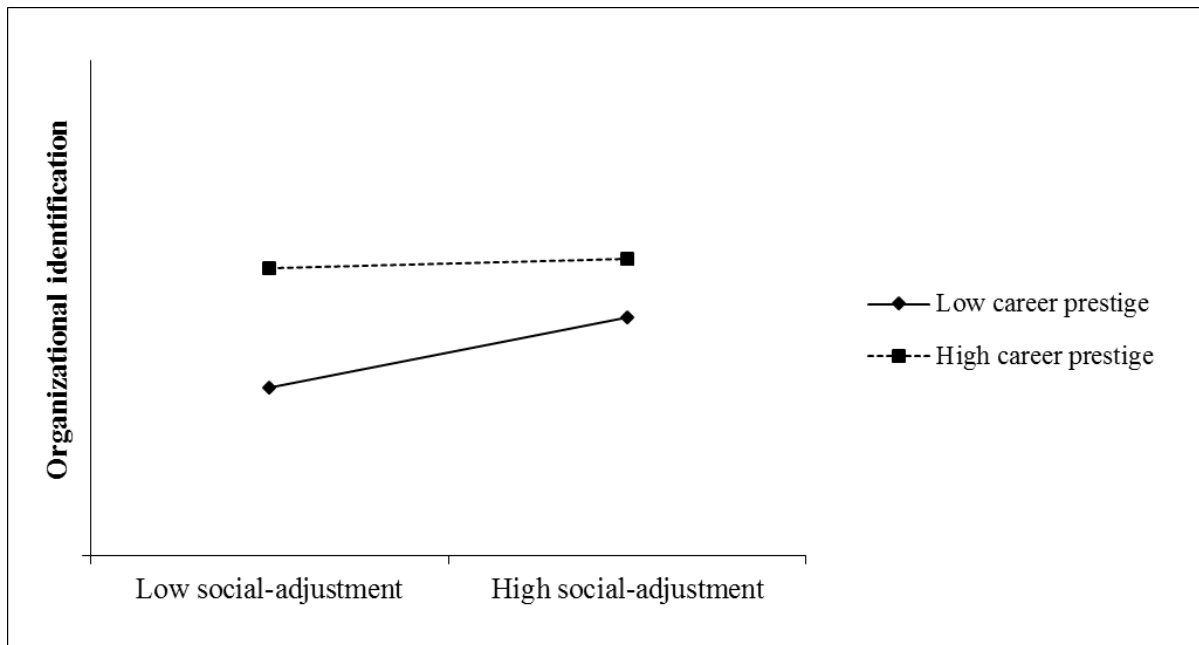
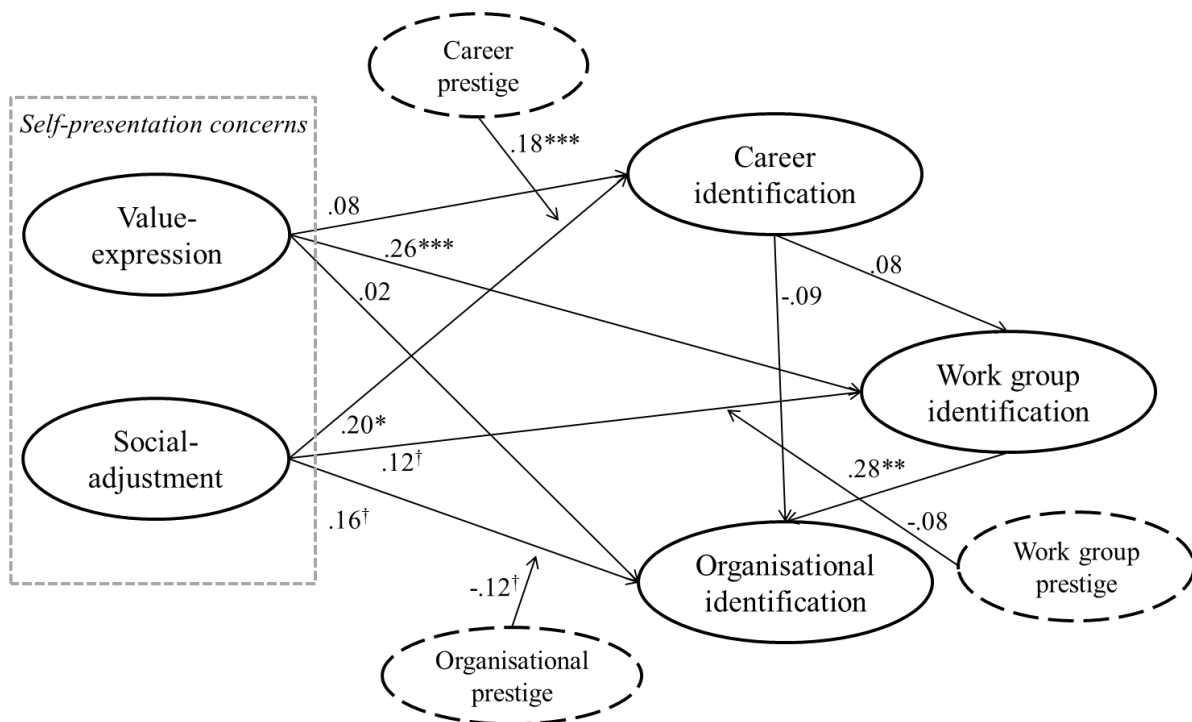


Figure 3. Results of PLS-SEM analysis



Note: Shown are PLS-SEM results for Model 3, including interaction effects. Continuous variables used in the interaction terms have been standardized.

n = 144. †p ≤ .1; \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001

## Tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	mean	s.d.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Age	47.04	8.72	1.00											
2. Career Identification	3.53	.70	-.12	1.00										
3. Career Prestige	3.83	.60	.06	.50**	1.00									
4. Gender	1.92	.28	.22*	-.05	-.04	1.00								
5. Hierarchical Level	2.30	.72	-.21*	-.12	-.15	-.09	1.00							
6. Organizational Identification	3.88	.67	.04	.28**	.24*	-.12	-.34**	1.00						
7. Organizational Prestige	3.41	.68	.03	.43**	.52**	-.05	-.28**	.55**	1.00					
8. Organizational Size	4.41	.86	.16	-.31**	-.09	.06	-.04	-.15	-.14	1.00				
9. Social Adjustment	3.40	.65	.00	.43**	.43**	-.07	-.04	.36**	.38**	-.10	1.00			
10. Value Expression	4.13	.48	.16	.31**	.37**	-.03	-.16	.38**	.41**	-.15	.47**	1.00		
11. Work Group Identification	4.20	.54	.01	.37**	.41**	-.15	-.25*	.49**	.41**	.00	.38**	.50**	1.00	
12. Work Group Prestige	3.75	.69	.11	.31**	.60**	-.09	-.14	.32**	.52**	.01	.20*	.30**	.63**	1.00

Note: s.d.=standard deviation. Organizational size is coded 1 for <50, 2 for 51-250, 3 for 251-500, 4 for 501-1,000, and 5 for >1,000 employees. Gender is coded 1 for female and 2 for male. Hierarchical level is coded 1 for senior management, 2 for middle management, 3 for first-level management, 4 for professional, and 5 for non-management.

n = 144. \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001



Table 2. Results of PLS-SEM analysis

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	CI	WGI	OI	CI	WGI	OI	CI	WGI	OI
<b>Controls</b>									
Organizational size	- .25** * (.06)	.01 (.04)	-.10 (.07)	-.23*** (.07)	.09 (.06)	-.13 <sup>†</sup> (.07)	-.23*** (.07)	.09 (.06)	-.13 <sup>†</sup> (.07)
Age	-.14 <sup>†</sup> (.08)	-.10 <sup>†</sup> (.05)	.02 (.04)	-.14 <sup>†</sup> (.08)	-.12 <sup>†</sup> (.06)	.02 (.04)	-.14 <sup>†</sup> (.08)	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (.06)	.01 (.04)
Gender	.01 (.05)	-.09 <sup>†</sup> (.05)	-.11 (.08)	.02 (.05)	-.08 (.05)	-.07 (.07)	.01 (.05)	-.08 (.06)	-.06 (.07)
Hierarchical level	-.08 (.06)	-.21*** (.07)	-.22** (.07)	-.09 (.06)	-.16* (.06)	-.18** (.07)	-.10 (.06)	-.14* (.06)	-.15* (.07)
Career prestige	.47** * (.06)	--- ---	--- ---	.36*** (.08)	--- ---	--- ---	.36*** (.09)	--- ---	--- ---
Work group prestige	--- ---	.61*** (.06)	--- ---	--- ---	.48*** (.06)	--- ---	--- ---	.48*** (.06)	--- ---
Organizational prestige	--- ---	--- ---	.47*** (.07)	--- ---	--- ---	.35*** (.09)	--- ---	--- ---	.36*** (.09)
<b>Explanatory variables</b>									
Value-expression				.04 (.06)	.29*** (.07)	.01 (.06)	.04 (.05)	.29*** (.07)	.02 (.07)
Social-adjustment				.23** (.08)	.11 <sup>†</sup> (.06)	.14 <sup>†</sup> (.08)	.20* (.08)	.11 <sup>†</sup> (.07)	.16 <sup>†</sup> (.09)
CI				--- ---	.07 (.06)	-.10 (.07)	--- ---	.09 (.06)	-.09 (.07)
WGI				--- ---	--- ---	.27*** (.09)	--- ---	--- ---	.27*** (.09)
<b>Interaction effects</b>									
Career prestige x social-adjustment							.18*** (.05)	--- ---	--- ---
Work group prestige x social-adjustment							--- ---	-.07 (.05)	--- ---
Organizational prestige x social-adjustment							--- ---	--- ---	-.11 <sup>†</sup> (.06)
No. of observations	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144	144
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	.32	.44	.34	.36	.54	.41	.40	.54	.41
Δ R <sup>2</sup> adjusted				.04	.10	.07	.04	.00	.00

Note: CI = Career identification; WGI = Work group identification; OI = Organizational identification. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Continuous variables used in the interaction terms have been standardized. Organizational size is coded 1 for <250 employees, 2 for 251-1,000 employees, and 3 for >1,000 employees. Gender is coded 1 for female and 2 for male. Hierarchical level is coded 1 for senior management, 2 for middle management, 3 for first-level management, 4 for professional, and 5 for non-management.

n = 144. <sup>†</sup>p ≤ .1; \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001

## Appendix A

Table A.1. Common method variance assessment

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Career identification	(.74)								
2. Career prestige	.50***	(.76)							
3. Organizational identification	.28***	.24**	(.69)						
4. Organizational prestige	.44***	.52***	.55***	(.82)					
5. Social-adjustment	.43***	.43***	.37***	.38***	(.77)				
6. Value-expression	.31***	.37***	.38***	.41***	.47***	(.70)			
7. Work group prestige	.31***	.60***	.32***	.52***	.20*	.30***	(.86)		
8. Marker variable	.06	.07	.11	.05	.03	.04	.01	(1.00)	
9. Work group identification	.37***	.41***	.50***	.41***	.38***	.50***	.62***	.03	(.70)
$r_{Yi\ M}$	.35***	.39***	.48***	.40***	.36***	.49***	.61***	.00	
$r_{Yi\ M}$	.48***	.52***	.71***	.48***	.47***	.71***	.71***	.00	

Note: Values on the diagonal and in parentheses are estimates of scale reliability (i.e. Cronbach alpha). Negative correlations were reversed into positive correlations to allow for the computation of common-method-variance adjusted correlations.  $r_{Yi\ M}$  estimates partial correlations corrected for common method variance;  $r_{Yi\ M}$  estimates disattenuated partial correlations corrected for common method variance and unreliability in the measurement of the marker variable.

n = 144. \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001

Table A.2. Sensitivity Analysis

a	z <sub>a</sub>	r' <sub>s</sub>	$r_{Y1\ M}$	$r_{Y2\ M}$	$r_{Y3\ M}$	$r_{Y4\ M}$	$r_{Y5\ M}$	$r_{Y6\ M}$	$r_{Y7\ M}$
.25	1.15	.10	.28***	.32***	.43***	.33***	.29***	.43***	.57***
.05	1.96	.16	.23**	.27**	.38***	.28***	.24**	.39***	.54***
.01	2.58	.21	.18*	.22**	.34***	.23**	.19*	.35***	.51***

Note:  $r_{Yi\ M}$  estimates partial correlations corrected for common method variance relating to r'<sub>s</sub> as upper bound.

n = 144. \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001

## Appendix B

Table B.1. Measurement items and validity assessment

<b>Social-adjustment: <math>\alpha = .77</math>; CR = .85; AVE = .59; HSV = .22; VIF = 1.53</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. It is important that the company I work for is popular and prestigious.		.85***
2. Working for an impressive company would make me seem impressive to others.		.69***
3. I want to work for a company that is perceived to be impressive.		.78***
4. I would consider how impressive my family thinks working for the company would be.		.75***
5. I wonder if strangers would be impressed by where I work.		--- <sup>a</sup>
<b>Value-expression: <math>\alpha = .70</math>; CR = .83; AVE = .61; HSV = .25; VIF = 1.61</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. I want to be proud of the company I work for.		.84***
2. I would not work for a company with a bad image.		--- <sup>a</sup>
3. I would hope that the company has an honourable reputation in the community.		.77***
4. It is important to work for a company that is scandal-free.		.74***
5. I believe where you work is an important part of who you are.		--- <sup>a</sup>
<b>Perceived career prestige: <math>\alpha = .76</math>; CR = .86; AVE = .67; HSV = .36; VIF = 1.30</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. This profession* is reputable.		.88***
2. I find this profession* prestigious.		.87***
3. There are probably many who would like to work in this profession*.		.69***
* Here, the term 'profession' refers to the respondents' specific job, rather than their occupation. A common comprehension was assured via precise instructions in the introduction to these questions.		
<b>Perceived work group prestige: <math>\alpha = .86</math>; CR = .92; AVE = .78; HSV = .39; VIF = 1.18</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. Employees are proud to say they work in this team.		.89***
2. This team is a reputable team to work in.		.92***
3. I find this team a prestigious place to work.		.84***
4. There are probably many who would like to work in this team.		--- <sup>a</sup>
<b>Perceived organizational prestige: <math>\alpha = .82</math>; CR = .90; AVE = .74; HSV = .30; VIF = 1.51</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. Employees are proud to say they work at this company.		.85***
2. This organisation is a reputable company to work for.		--- <sup>a</sup>
3. This company has a reputation as being an excellent employer.		.86***
4. I find this company a prestigious place to work.		.88***
5. There are probably many who would like to work at this company.		--- <sup>a</sup>
<b>Career identification: <math>\alpha = .74</math>; CR = .85; AVE = .66; HSV = 0.25; VIF = 1.56</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. I identify myself as a career-oriented person.		.83***
2. Being career-oriented reflects my personality well.		.84***
3. My career plays a central role in my life.		.77***
4. The ambitions in my life mainly have to do with my career.		--- <sup>a</sup>
<b>Work group identification: <math>\alpha = .70</math>; CR = .83; AVE = .62; HSV = .39; VIF = 1.57</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. I am very interested in what others think about my team.		.75***
2. When I talk about my team, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.		.80***
3. The successes of my team are my successes.		.82***
4. When someone praises my team, it feels like a personal compliment.		--- <sup>a</sup>
<b>Organizational identification: <math>\alpha = .69</math>; CR = .83; AVE = .62; HSV = .30; VIF = 1.56</b>		<b>SFL</b>
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)		
1. I am very interested in what others think about my organisation.		.82***

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2.	When I talk about my organisation, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.	.76***
3.	The successes of my organisation are my successes.	.79***
4.	When someone praises my organisation, it feels like a personal compliment.	--- <sup>a</sup>

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Note: SFL = standardized factor loading;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance-extracted; HSV = highest shared variance with other constructs; VIF = variance inflation factor.

n = 144. \*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01; \*\*\*p ≤ .001